

6-1981

## Book Reviews: "The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren"; Et al.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/jphs>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

(1981) "Book Reviews: "The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren"; Et al.," *Jackson Purchase Historical Society*. Vol. 9 : No. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/jphs/vol9/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Murray State's Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jackson Purchase Historical Society by an authorized editor of Murray State's Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [msu.digitalcommons@murraystate.edu](mailto:msu.digitalcommons@murraystate.edu).

# BOOK REVIEWS

Walter Darnell Haden, Editor

---

Victor Strandberg. *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1977.

For over five decades now Robert Penn Warren has been a major voice in American letters. His accomplishments in numerous areas have been impressive, to say the least. As critic he has been instrumental in shaping the course of contemporary fiction and poetry; as essayist he has had a strong impact on contemporary social problems; as novelist he has been rewarded with the Pulitzer Prize; and as poet he has also been honored with that award. In all of these endeavors Warren has basically been concerned with what Faulkner would have termed the "old verities" of political and moral courage, of man's place in time and the cosmos, of man's initiation into a knowledge of good and evil, and as Lewis P. Simpson has stated concerning Faulkner, of "the fundamental connection of sex and history."

It is not surprising, then, that Victor Strandberg in *The Poetic Vision* would attempt a reassessment of Warren's poetry by using a thematic approach. What is surprising is that he would examine the poetry exclusively through just the content, for Warren has always been an experimenter in poetic forms, and it would appear to be difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at any valid conclusions about his poetry that did not take style and form, as well as content, into consideration.

According to Strandberg, there are three major themes in Warren's poetry: passage, the undiscovered self, and mysticism. Approaching the poems in a roughly chronological order, he analyzes selected poems from Warren's early, middle and late periods and discovers a "thematic growth" in Warren's thought. For instance, Strandberg quotes Warren as stating that the central question in modern life is "can man live on the purely naturalistic level?" In the poems of passage, Strandberg says, the answer is sometimes, "no," but more often, "just barely." Warren's personae, however, seek a better world than this naturalistic one of fragmentation, fear, and alienation. This search leads them to the undiscovered self and, finally mysticism. The "descent into the undiscovered self" was to provide man's escape from the wasteland of naturalism; for although in Warren's thought it is the polluted animal self that holds the secret of intimate identity, the search itself produced possibilities for religious experience or mysticism. In his analysis of Warren's themes Strandberg makes frequent use of William James, Eliot, Freud, and Jung to show their possible influence on Warren's thought, but more surely Warren's own struggle with the great basic issues of modern man.

In *The Poetic Vision* Strandberg has given us some new and important

insights into the content of Warren's poetry. It is unfortunate that he failed to incorporate into his discussion the contributing impact of Warren's marvelous style and form. This lack is lessened somewhat by Strandberg's appending a postscript, "Some Notes on Verse Texture." This is a fine essay on Warren's verse techniques which reveals Strandberg's ability to handle this aspect of Warren's poetry. It makes us more firm in our opinion that the author would have had a better book if he had incorporated this concept into the body of the text.

One final word: both the introductory chapter, "The Critical Reckoning," and the final one, "The Question of 'Place'," seem to be superfluous. One can hardly do justice to the multitudinous volume of criticism on Warren's poetry in such a brief discussion, and attempting to "place" any artist among his peers would appear to be a highly subjective exercise in futility. Strandberg has written, however, a valuable book and one to be recommended highly.

Frank Windham, Ph.D

---

Julia Neal. *The Kentucky Shakers*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1977.

Since the 1940s Julia Neal has studied and written about the Kentucky Shakers. She admires much about the Shakers and her admiration for one particular believer is evident in the dedication: "To Eldress Bertha Lindsey of the Canterbury Shakers who has the gift to be simple and who is what she seems." Neal undertook the book on the premise that "passing institutions in America seem to receive more attention than do living ones." Further, she has sought to present accounts of the two Kentucky Shaker Societies, Pleasant Hill and South Union, from original manuscripts, although she has minimized the number and length of quotations. It would have been beneficial to this reviewer if the author had included a map of Kentucky to help the reader more readily relate to the geographical location of Pleasant Hill and South Union.

For some reason Neal has chosen to reveal information gradually about the United Believers in the Second Appearing of Christ, the proper name for the group, although the members were more popularly known as Shakers. The first two chapters tell of the missionary effort to establish the faith in the American West of the very early 1800s and the general activities of Kentucky Shakers thereafter. Then in Chapter Three she explains fully the beliefs and practices of basically what was a communal movement in the U.S. from the 1770s into the late 1800s. Among other goals, believers wanted "to shake themselves free from prejudices, all wrong, all sin, all evil of every name and nature." Missionaries exhorted listeners to confess their sins and lead an exemplary life, devote themselves to communal living which included celibacy, and to know that the Shaker lifestyle called for "industry, honesty, [and] simplicity." The Shakers' commitment to those tenets expressed itself in equating their handiwork with "giving their hearts

to God” for communal benefits and the needy outside the group.

Understandably such groups throughout American history have met with a varied reception, and so it was with the Shakers. At times outsiders were attracted to Shaker meetings out of curiosity or an awareness that Shakers often danced after their worship. Some people admired the results of Shaker hard work and wanted to trade with them. Other individuals opposed the Shakers’ “parting man and wife, [and] breaking up families.” However, the persecution of the Shakers was relatively mild until the 1860s and 1870s when the Shakers found themselves attacked or abused by both Northern and Southern partisans. Indeed, those events and the subsequent industrial age went far toward destroying “the promise of utopian living which seemed so near in the late forties and early fifties.”

Neal’s book offers a brief but overall look at Kentucky Shakers. Persons interested in past religious and communal experimentation may wish to read this book. It is a worthy introduction to Shakerism and a part of the Kentucky Bicentennial Bookshelf series.

Marvin Downing, Ph.D

---

Philip Ardery. *Bomber Pilot*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1978.

You don’t need to know how to fly. You don’t need to know anything in particular about flying. You don’t need to know airplanes or the difference between bombers and pursuits to enjoy this thrilling story. Ardery has the gift of being able to write his story so that anyone who loves his country, or anyone who simply loves a grand and enthralling adventure will find this book engrossing.

Ardery’s story covers only about five years — 1940 through 1945. He began flight training at Lincoln, Nebraska, in late summer of 1940, and this is a story that bounces from peak to peak across his thrilling five years of active duty. The greater part of the story is about World War II and the African and European campaigns. Ardery tells his story vividly. It brings to mind many experiences I had as a “gadget” in class 42E. During the Second World War, I knew all the airplanes he talked about and flew most of them, even the B-24 he flew amazingly through dangerous and fatiguing situations.

The raid on the Ploesti Oil Refinery and the daylight raid on Berlin were thrillingly told; the tragic cost, the unheralded bravery, the faith, and the fear are delicately presented. I lost two close friends in the Ploesti raid. Reading this firsthand recounting of that mission rekindled my grief.

*Bomber Pilot* is a marvelous story from “takeoff” at Lexington, Kentucky, to the day Ardery returned to San Angelo, Texas, hearing his wife Anne say to their son: “It’s your daddy, Pete. He’s come back.”

John Wilson, Ph.D

---

J. V. Ridgely. *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980.

The University Press of Kentucky is to be highly commended for its series "New Perspectives on the South," of which this is one volume. Charles P. Roland, the general editor, explains that the design of the series is to give a fresh and comprehensive view of the South's history, as seen in the light of the striking developments since World War II in the affairs of the region. Each volume is expected to be a complete essay representing both a synthesis of the best scholarship on the subject and an interpretative analysis derived from the author's own reflections. The wide range of the series can be perceived in those volumes already published, ranging from essays on Southern music to the South and American foreign affairs.

The present volume is a worthy addition to this series. It also reveals both the strength and weaknesses of such an undertaking. Choosing J. V. Ridgely for the essay on *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature* was a wise decision. Mr. Ridgely is a respected student of Southern literature. His volumes in the Twayne series on William Gilmore Simms and John Pendleton Kennedy, as well as his numerous articles on Poe and other aspects of nineteenth century literature certainly have earned him the esteem of many of his colleagues. Ridgely's abilities are well reflected in the present volume. Indeed, the sections "The Southern Romance: The Matter of Virginia" and those sections dealing specifically with Simms are the strong points of the essay. Professor Ridgely is also to be commended for his clarity and conciseness. He has tackled the seemingly impossible task of surveying nineteenth-century southern literature in a brief volume and overall he has managed his job quite well. His introductory essay on "Southern" and the final chapter "The Legacy" give the work a sense of completeness that would otherwise have been missing.

As with any work of such a broad scope, one can argue with some of the exclusions Ridgely has felt it necessary to make. Surely, the importance of the Southern humorists in understanding the work of Twain and Faulkner would have justified more space extended to them. In the same vein, more time could have been spent on Twain even though Professor Ridgely does make good use of Arthur G. Pettit's excellent study *Mark Twain and the South* in discussing Twain's ambivalent attitude toward the South.

Although these exclusions are not minor, they do not detract excessively from the overall worth of this volume. Ridgely has added an excellent bibliographical note on the major general works of nineteenth-century southern literature. There is also an adequate index. This book is recommended for the general reader and for undergraduate students in southern literature.

Frank Windham, Ph.D

---

Helen Deiss Irvin, *Women in Kentucky*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979.

Helen Deiss Irvin's *Women in Kentucky* is a small book dealing with history in new and interesting ways. It covers the 205 years since Rebecca Boone arrived in 1775, and tells how women have tamed and civilized the "Dark and Bloody Ground."

Heroic and self-sufficient women took advantage of frontier egalitarianism to prove their mettle. Esther Whitley of Logan's Fort and Mrs. John Merrill were skillful with the rifle, and the latter was a famous Indian fighter. Several pioneer Kentucky women were captured by Indians. Irvin tells about the capture of Mary Ingles, Jenny Wiley, Hanna Sovereigns (who had her tongue cut out by the Shawnee), and Jemima Boone.

Equal importance is given to the contribution of Anny Lindsey, who gained fame by mixing buffalo wool and nettle fibers into a cloth called linsey-woolsey, and to Jane Coomes, who, in 1776, organized the first school in the state.

Frontier egalitarianism was short-lived and was early replaced by elitism. One true proof of elitism is a coterie of fashionably-dressed, superficially-educated, frivolous, ornamental, upper-class women. Kentucky was blessed with an adequate supply of such belles until the War Between the States. Lexington gained early recognition as the state's social capitol. Young Lexington women enrolled in Professor Dunham's Female Academy, attended cotillions and balls, and sought advantageous marriages.

Sallie Ward, educated in French finishing schools, was the belle of Louisville. Margaretta Mason Brown, from New York City, delighted Frankfort society. Wives of large landholders, in addition to being ornamental, often had heavy responsibilities during the elitist period. Lucrecia Clay, for example, ran Ashland while her husband engaged in politics and gambling.

At the lower end of the scale were slave women. They did house work or field work. they were beaten and raped with no thought that they were human. They or any member of their family could be sold "down the river" at any time. Some slave women rebelled at the risk of their lives, and others took the dangerous underground railroad to Canada.

The War Between the States shook the social hierarchy. Without slave labor, previously ornamental women had to take on the burden of household chores and work in fields and factories.

Labor had little success in organizing women in Kentucky, though they were exploited in garment, textile, and tobacco factories. Women were paid less than men in all occupations, including teaching. None received a living wage.

The poor or tenant farm wife existed in drudgery. A rediscovered novel by Edith Summers Kelley, *Weeds* (1923), describes the hopelessness of

the tenant family. Kelley, college graduate, newspaper and magazine writer, worked as a tenant farmer, then as a maid doing day work until she died in obscurity.

There was little concern for the health or safety of factory women or farm tenant women in Kentucky, but there was much concern about women who sought higher education. Some ministers warned that women who sought education might collapse with brain fever and physical breakdown. The Reverend J. W. Porter of Louisville decried such feminism as the product of anarchy and Bolshevism.

Irvin's last, longest, and best developed chapter deals with remarkable women reformers who gave years of their lives for the remediation of social ills. Kentucky suffragists celebrated ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment at Ashland with Emmaline Pankhurst as guest of honor. But the native Kentuckians who celebrated that night were no militants like Pankhurst. They were generally well-to-do matrons such as the Breckenridges, Clays, and Hubbards who had used their money and position to bring about reform, always considering themselves workers in God's cause.

Carrie Nation, the temperance leader, grew up in Garrard County. She was well known in the West for her hymn-singing, hatchet-wielding forays on saloons. Kentucky saloon keepers capitalized on her fame by concocting a drink which they called "Carrie Nation's Cocktail."

Outstanding health work was accomplished by Mary Breckenridge's "Frontier Nursing Service," by Cora Stewart's "Moonlight Schools" for adults, by Jean Brandies' "Birth Control League," and by Dr. Louise Hutchins' birth control clinic at Berea.

Helen Deiss is to be congratulated for her careful scholarship in collecting information for this history and for her organization of people and events by important social and political trends. Organization within chapters is sometimes confusing, but this is a small complaint when set beside the marvelous pioneering work she has done. *Women in Kentucky* has a more rational perspective of history than the paradigm of war and territorial expansion generally in use since the time of Julius Caesar. It is an interesting, well-documented, useful addition to the Kentucky Bicentennial Bookshelf.

Kellie F. Jones, Ph.D.

---

Bell I. Wiley, ed. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia 1833-1869*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980.

Most of the 12,000 American blacks who went to Liberia between 1820 and 1861 were members of families who had been brought to America in the 1600s. Liberia was created by the American Colonization Society, an organization formed in Washington, D.C., in 1817 to transport freeborn and emancipated blacks to Africa and help them start a new life in the "land of their fathers." The Society originated in the flood of reform sentiment in the



early years of the nineteenth century, but the motives of those who supported the Society were mixed. These motives ranged from viewing slavery as evil to the motives of reducing the black population; some even felt that the new Liberians would carry what they had learned of Christianity back to Africa, becoming missionaries of sorts.

All in all, it was a noble experiment, requiring courage on the part of the blacks who returned. These new settlers battled virulent tropical diseases, marauding wild beasts, and fierce native tribesmen; sometimes with only basic hand tools they carved out fields from the dense forests.

Their letters, carefully selected in groups which indicate correspondence over a long time-period, are letters of particular families with only a few miscellaneous letters included. The letters are about physical deprivation, the lack of adequate tools for farming, the discouragements faced in numerous areas. But despite complaints and discouragements, which were often accompanied by requests for help, the settlers in Liberia (from *liber*, meaning "free") demonstrated a remarkable courage to cope with nature and to endure.

Bell I. Wiley has collected and annotated 273 letters written from Liberia by former slaves. To read the letters is to gain a new understanding of slavery and of freedom, one that senses the strength of the black family and makes one more aware of the strength of the religious faith with which the former slaves had been ingrained.

An excellent reference for any student of the period.

William E. Bennett

---

Frances Jewell McVey and Robert Berry Jewell, *Uncle Will of Wildwood*.  
Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974.

This little book is subtitled *Nineteenth Century Life in the Bluegrass*. Co-authored by a great-grandniece and a great-grandnephew of its subject, Will Goddard, it was originally written in 1938 for family and friends of Uncle Will. The manuscript was resurrected in 1974, capably and admirably introduced by Thomas D. Clark, and published in the Kentucky Bicentennial Series. Professor Clark's able introduction to the geographical, historical, and cultural period complements the reminiscent, sometimes nostalgic, and anecdotal narrative of the novel itself.

Although the novel is primarily a history of Will Goddard (b. 1819), and secondarily of his wife Sarah Eliza and their nine children, it is much more. It is an account of agrarian life in the Bluegrass depicted in the folk vein. Horse trading stories, "three ways to become a Kentucky Colonel," stories about preachers and revivals, and folk euphemisms, expressions, and metaphors enrich the narrative. Never does the reader lose sight that the authors are dealing with a Kentucky Bluegrass aristocratic family, but they remain "folk," despite their decorum, etiquette, finery, and all. The narrative is tied essentially to the soil and to Wildwood; everything leads both to and away



from it.

Uncle Will, the central character, emerges as a loyal, wryly humorous, law-abiding, impulsive individualist. He was a square shooter, a man of his word, in possession of impeccable character. He despised sham, pretense, shoddiness, liquor, and "dam' Yankees," and he had no respect for organized religious institutions. Underneath his aristocratic veneer — white linen coat and all — was a true folk character which manifested itself in language, retorts, quips, actions, and behavior apropos to such a character. The novel is a candid appraisal, so much so that some genteel readers may have a sense of fitness aroused by the descriptively honest — yet profane — language which Uncle Will used appropriately.

Respected in Mercer County, and more particularly around Harrodsburg and into Lexington, Uncle Will garnered the good will and trust of his neighbors. And he moved beyond the Mercer County environs. He counted among his friends, and on occasions entertained them lavishly at Wildwood, such political and military notables as William Jennings Bryan, Henry Clay, Col. W. C. P. Breckenridge, Commonwealth Governor McCreary, Senator Beck, and U.S. Senator Joe C. Blackburn. Uncle Will was too busy, and never wished to seek public office himself.

Next to Sarah Eliza and his children, Uncle Will loved his horses, his shorthorn cattle, his Southdown sheep, and his especially beloved Wildwood. In Will Goddard's day, Kentucky was already establishing itself as thoroughbred horse country, and he made an indelible contribution to horsebreeding. Parenthetically, many readers have probably secretly wished to meet and know a horsetrader half as honest as Will Goddard.

Although certain agrarian aspects, such as county fairs, are treated in some depth by the author, many other aspects are only superficially treated or are mentioned only in passing. Be that as it may, the general reader can get a rather informed view of nineteenth century life in the Bluegrass told in a vigorous and delightful style, if only the nostalgic veil of *Uncle Will of Wildwood* is pulled aside.

James E. Spears

---

Bryan Woolley. *We Be Here When The Morning Comes*. Photographs by Ford Reid, foreword by Robert Coles. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975.

*We Be Here When The Morning Comes* gives an in-depth view of the Brookside Miners Strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, which attracted national attention in the early 1970s. Its view of the strike, the issues and the people who were involved as seen through the eyes of the striking miners and their allies helps the reader to gain a good understanding of labor problems in Appalachian coal-producing areas. These are issues that are not readily understood by people who are not directly involved in the day-to-day life of the mining areas. To an outsider — even to many resi-

dents of Appalachian states — it may appear that the main reason for any strike is simply that the workers do not want to work, they make incredible demands on management or that “all the trouble is caused by outside agitators.” Bryan Woolley’s journalism puts into very simple and most human terms the real issues involved in labor disputes in the Appalachian coal areas.

The issue of mine safety is discussed at length not by “experts” but by people whose lives depend literally upon safe working conditions. In their own words the miners tell of the hazards of working in unsafe mines where coal profits are often more important than human life. Safety was to most miners “the mainest thing” the strike at Brookside was about. Also involved are the right to strike when safety regulations are not met and the need for strong, supportive leadership from the United Mine Workers Union. This book clearly emphasizes the belief that the only factor that can ultimately insure safe working conditions for the miners is a strong, democratically controlled union.

Woolley clearly defines these issues by realistic presentations of strike events and of the striking miners, their families and their allies: people like Louie and Ruby Stacy, Tub and Nannie Rainey, the Rev. “Tag” King, Junior Deaton and other strikers. These Brooksideers are described so well that the reader is very quickly involved in the story of their lives told in a steady, narrative fashion. Highlighting this narrative is the fatal shooting of Lawrence Jones, a striking miner, by Billy Carroll Bruner, a foreman at the Brookside mines. Such violence clearly illustrates the tragic divisions caused in the community by the strike between “union men” and “scabs.” Woolley’s descriptions of the union men and of scabs are in the language of the strikers, which is quite partisan. In their terms, a union man is one who believes in working for the common good through collective action while a scab is one who believes in the principle of “every man for himself.”

Although Woolley gives very interesting profiles of strikers and their supporters, he gives none of the scabs. The author had to do much probing to get a story at all. This description of non-union workers may very well have been impossible, but it would have made the book more interesting.

The photographs by Ford Reid give the book a further dimension of power which complements Woolley’s 104-page text very well. Reid’s photographs of events such as the picket lines, the funeral of Lawrence Jones and the group of victorious union men are quite moving. One wishes that they had been distributed throughout the text rather than in separate sections. A map of the area would have enhanced the text by giving the reader a better sense of location.

*We Be Here When the Morning Comes* gives the reader the opportunity to learn about the events from the people who lived them. Robert Coles’ foreword should be read before and after reading the text and studying the photographs. It clearly shows the importance of the book as a work about poor people struggling for a better life for themselves and their children.

This documentary can be read profitably not only in order to understand problems facing miners and their families in the Appalachian coal fields but also to grasp the problems facing workers in other hazardous industries as well. With the increasing emphasis on coal as a primary energy source, more consumers may very well need to develop an understanding of the human factors involved in the mining of coal. *We Be Here When the Morning Comes* can contribute much to that understanding.

Robert Hayes

---

William J. Scheick. *The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979.

William J. Scheick, professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, has written an important book on the half-blood as a cultural symbol in nineteenth century American fiction. Although several studies of the Indian in American literature and thought during this period have been published, Scheick is the first scholar to pay particular attention to the half-blood, the offspring of Indian and white parents. Like the fictional Indian, the fictional half-blood embodied both fact and myth, but in contrast to the Indian, the half-blood was not so readily depicted as either a "noble savage" or the "barbaric antithesis to civilization." Rather, "by his very nature the half-blood epitomized the integration (whether successful or unsuccessful) of the red and white races, provided a dramatic symbol of the benign possibilities or malign probabilities inherent in this encounter." The half-blood was frequently employed in American fiction to remind white readers that "the savage element lies latent in all people, that of the two sides of this divided human nature, the dark savage one might readily shatter social restraint."

Nineteenth century American writers were, on the whole, ambivalent toward half-bloods. Some authors, mostly southerners, viewed them as merely "red niggers" and warned against the threat of "interracial pollution," but half-bloods were more viable literary subjects than mulattoes. Half-bloods often benefited from an implied relationship between their Indian features and the idea of the noble savage. Since Indians were considered a vanishing race, the Indian side of the half-blood was supposedly becoming recessive. According to Scheick, "the decline of the Indian in number and in physical presence, as opposed to the increasing visibility of the Negro in white society, permitted authors to feel greater comfort with half-blood than with mulatto characters." Finally, despite opposition to Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy and other features of federal Indian policy, the so-called "Indian problem" never divided America into factions equivalent in force and effect to the "black problem." Although the half-blood's literary viability was greater than that of the mulatto, he always remained an enigma: "half Indian, half white man, and half devil." Fictional portraits of half-bloods oscillated between extremes.

Southern accounts tended more toward viewing them as a form of pollution or disorder which posed a danger to existing social patterns, while northern accounts tended to emphasize their "benign possibilities" more than their "malign probabilities." By simultaneously embodying the antithesis and the epitome of human possibility, Scheick argues, the half-blood "reinvigorated American society's sense of itself, particularly of its relation to the idea of America's promise established during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."

Cultural and literary historians will want to have this brief book on their shelves for ready reference. Historians of native American history and Indian-white relations, however, will find that the role of half-bloods in nineteenth century federal Indian policy is treated cursorily. Anyone interested in the white point of view or in the activities of real mixed-bloods such as the Colberts who were involved in the Jackson Purchase Treaty will have to look elsewhere, but Scheick has much to offer those concerned with cultural symbols.

Ronald N. Satz, Ph.D.

---

